

See Every Ad Your Competitor Is Running

Both links, and how to read them. About 15 minutes, start to finish. Nothing to install, no account needed, and your competitor is never notified.

Before you open anything, write down one competitor.

One real business in your area that sells what you sell. Not a national chain — a company you could drive to. Everything below is faster when you have a specific name in front of you instead of browsing.

1 Open the Meta Ad Library

facebook.com/ads/library

This covers every ad running on Facebook and Instagram. Set it up like this:

- Set **Country** to United States.
- Set **Ad category** to **All ads**. (The other categories are for political and housing ads and will hide what you want.)
- Type your competitor's business name in the search box and pick their Page from the dropdown.
- If several similar Pages come up, open the business's actual Facebook Page, go to **Page transparency**, and click through to their ads from there. That gets you the real one instead of a fan page or a franchise account.

2 Read the card — the date is the whole thing

Every ad shows up as a card. Four things on it matter:

Started running on	The single most useful number on the page. A local business paying for the same ad three or four months straight is making money on it. Nobody funds a loser that long.
The image or video	Notice whether it's a real photo of their crew and their work, or a stock image. In local service businesses, the real photos almost always win.
The headline and text	What promise are they making? A price, a guarantee, a timeframe, financing? That's the offer their market responds to.
Number of versions	A card may say the ad has multiple versions. That means they're testing, which means someone competent is running the account. Worth watching closely.

Sort the list in your head into two piles. Ads running under 30 days are tests — they may or may not be working. Ads running 90 days or longer are proven. Only study the second pile.

3 Now check Google

adstransparency.google.com

This one covers Google Search, YouTube, Maps, Shopping and Play. Different ads, different intent — people searching for “roof repair near me” are ready to buy today, which is usually where the money is for local service businesses.

→ Search the competitor’s name, or better, their website domain. The domain result is usually the cleaner one.

→ Set **Region** to United States.

→ Click **See all ads** under the first few cards — it only shows a handful until you do, and people quit before they see the real list.

→ Click into an individual ad. The detail view shows when it was **first shown** and **last shown**. First-shown is your run-length signal, same as Meta.

One trap: the date filter at the top selects ads that were *shown* during that window, not ads that *started* in it. So leave it on **Any time** and read the first-shown date inside each ad instead. Filtering to “last 30 days” will make a two-year-old ad look brand new.

4 Write down five ads

Don’t just scroll and feel informed. Fill this in for the five longest-running ads you found across both tools. Ten minutes, and you’ll have something you can actually build from.

COMPETITOR	RUNNING SINCE	THE OFFER / PROMISE	IMAGE OR VIDEO?

5 Do one thing with it this week

Look down your five rows and find the promise that shows up more than once. If three competitors have all been running “free estimate, same-day callback” since spring, that’s not a coincidence — that’s the offer your market responds to, proven with their money.

Then pick one:

- Put that promise on your homepage, above the fold, in plain words.
- Rewrite your Google Business Profile description to lead with it.
- Run it as your first ad — matched to their offer, but with a real photo of your own work instead of stock.

A few things that will come up

“My competitor isn’t running any ads.”

Common in local trades, and it’s good news — paid is wide open in your market. Try a competitor one town over in a bigger metro, then search your category as a keyword (“roof replacement,” “dental implants”) instead of a business name.

“Can they tell I looked?”

No. Both libraries are public archives that Meta and Google are required to publish. There’s no notification, no log, and you don’t need to be logged in.

“Does a long-running ad definitely mean it’s profitable?”

For a small local business, close enough — they don’t have budget to waste for four months. It’s a weaker signal for national brands, whose campaigns run long for reasons unrelated to direct return. Neither library shows spend, clicks or leads, so treat run length as a signal, not proof.

“Should I just copy their ad?”

Copy the *structure* — the offer, the objection they answer, the format. Never the image, the copy, or the brand assets. Past the legal problem, a photo of their crew selling your service is the fastest way to look fake.

Both links again, so you don’t have to scroll back:

Meta (Facebook + Instagram) — facebook.com/ads/library

Google (Search, YouTube, Maps) — adstransparency.google.com

Both are free and run by Meta and Google. Their layouts change now and then, so a button may sit somewhere slightly different than described here.

Want a second set of eyes on what you find? I build websites and run Google Ads for small businesses. sogaus.com